

Administration Warns Moscow on Lithuania

By David Hoffman
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The White House warned the Soviet Union yesterday against creating "an atmosphere of intimidation and increasing tension" with Lithuania as jockeying intensified over the secessionist Baltic republic.

Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater, citing reports of Soviet troop movements along the Lithuanian border, said "the activities and statements of the Soviet government over the past few days are cause for concern. We are watching the situation closely."

His statement was the strongest the administration has issued since Lithuania declared its independence March 11. Attempting to support Lithuania's drive for independence while not provoking Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, the United States had for more than a week urged both sides to negotiate their differences.

But reports of troops on the move prompted President Bush to authorize a tougher statement, officials said.

Fitzwater said "we're not certain of all the intentions" of the troop movements, "and we don't have any indication of forcible control being exerted." However, he added, "those are cause for concern and they do precipitate a little higher level of interest on our part."

A senior administration official, who asked not to be identified by name, said "we have enough indications" to prompt a public statement but that "we honestly feel they're not going to use force." Although the reports of troop movements had caused some officials to fear the Soviets were preparing to seize key transportation and communications facilities, this official said others in the administration thought that the troops were planning to take up defensive positions.

A second official familiar with the situation said the troop movements were only the latest aspect of "jockeying all over the place" between

Moscow and the Lithuanian leaders. The official said he believes Gorbachev realizes that "if he cracks down, he sets back his relationship with the West," a relationship that has been steadily improving.

This official noted that, at the Malta summit, Bush told Gorbachev that the use of force in the Baltics would be counterproductive and urged a political solution. The official said Gorbachev responded that he would seek a political outcome. This was apparently the last time that Bush and Gorbachev discussed Baltic unrest.

Bush yesterday continued to praise Gorbachev's restraint. "I'm glad that they're still talking peaceful change," he told reporters at a picture-taking session with congressional leaders. "That's essential and they've been very good about it—the Soviets have all through Eastern Europe. And that's what everybody wants to see . . . a peaceful evolution in Lithuania."

Fitzwater, reading from a prepared statement, gently prodded Moscow to agree to negotiations with Lithuania. He referred to "the Lithuanian government," but insisted the United States was not extending formal diplomatic recognition to the republic.

"The United States notes that the Lithuanian government has expressed its readiness to address all legitimate Soviet interests, including economic interests, through negotiations," Fitzwater said. "We also note repeated Soviet statements that negotiations, not force, are the proper course in this situation We continue to urge a constructive dialogue. This would be complicated by an atmosphere of intimidation and increasing tension."

Also yesterday, Bush telephoned West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and reiterated U.S. support for the inviolability of Poland's current border with Germany, Fitzwater said. The call came on the eve of the visit by Polish Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki, who is expected to press the border issue when he meets with Bush today at the White House.